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TAGS: [IZ](#) [FI](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [PINR](#)
SUBJECT: RESPECTED FINNISH NGO HOLDS IRAQ PEACE CONFERENCE

REF: THOME-ANDERTON/DONEGAN/BISHARAT EMAILS 4
SEPTEMBER 2007

Classified By: POLCHIEF GREGORY THOME FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (U) The Crisis Management Initiative (CMI), a respected NGO headed by former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari, hosted a seminar at an undisclosed location in Finland Sept. 1-4 aimed at reducing the violence in Iraq. Participants included leading Iraqi Sunni and Shiite civil society leaders, as well as South African and Northern Irish representatives. After examining reconciliation experiences in other parts of the world, Iraqi participants produced a document entitled the "Helsinki Agreement," which calls on the participants (inter alia) to resolve political disputes in Iraq through non-violent means and to build support among their respective religious, tribal and ethnic constituencies for that goal (ref A). The GOF funded the seminar, but did not participate in it.

12. (C) For security and political reasons, CMI did not disclose the location of the conference and distributed to the press very little information about the gathering's substance or participants. Even the Embassy's own contacts at CMI, who are normally very forthcoming, apologized for what they described as the need to be extremely careful about sharing information. They were willing to confirm that representatives from Iraq's Sunni and Shia communities who may be parties to the violence participated; that President Ahtisaari himself did not participate; and that talks centered largely on looking at if and how Northern Irish and South African experiences might offer lessons learned that could be of use in reducing the violence in Iraq. Beyond that, however, our CMI contacts were unwilling to confirm press reports that claimed that representatives of Moktada al-Sadr, Humam Hammoudi or Adnan al-Dulaimi attended, just as they were unwilling to confirm any other participants' identities. (COMMENT: CMI's unwillingness to confirm participants does not necessarily mean that those individuals did not attend the conference. Many conference participants apparently demanded that no information -- substance of talks, participants, even travel arrangements -- be made public without the express agreement of all participants, and CMI intends to honor this request.)

13. (C) Although he did not participate directly in the seminar, MFA Director General for the Middle East and Africa Teemu Tanner was briefed and offered PolChief a wider readout. The event was "more academic than political," he said, both in terms of participants and substance. Like CMI, Tanner would not confirm media speculation about who actually attended, but said he understood that it included largely academics and civil society types. He characterized the event as "quite positive," in the sense that the Iraqi participants themselves came up with the points in the "Helsinki

Agreement" and agreed that the next step was for them to take responsibility for returning to Iraq and building support for the agreed-upon measures within the groups they represent or are affiliated with. If the participants are able to build support for the Helsinki Agreement among their constituencies in Iraq, Tanner said CMI would welcome the opportunity to host a follow-on event and that the GOF would fund it. However, no follow-on meetings are currently scheduled.

14. (C) The GOF and CMI were also pleased with the conference because any forward movement toward stemming violence in Iraq is a positive thing. And if the Iraqi participants, upon their return, deploy the good ideas and same spirit of cooperation they evinced while in Finland, a series of follow-on meetings either in Iraq or here could help in moving some sort of constructive process forward. Tanner did caution that it is too early to call this a "peace process." The media -- and particularly the Finnish press -- have been "overblown in their expectation of what can be achieved at a first meeting," he noted; if a "process" for peace is to emerge from CMI's effort, this was simply a first good step.

5 (C) COMMENT: Tanner is realistic and correct when he notes that it is too early to call CMI's initiative a "peace process" (as some in the press were quick to do). However, it is indeed a welcome first step that could produce helpful results in improving stability down the road, if the Iraqi participants live up to their commitments. CMI gained worldwide recognition for its effectiveness in conflict resolution after it successfully brokered a settlement to the decades-old conflict between Aceh rebels and the Indonesian Government in 2005. While Iraq is a far different situation, we are encouraged by the Finns' willingness to play a role in helping to create an environment in Iraq from which stability might emerge.

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